



## NEITHER MYTH NOR POWER—A REJOINDER

SIDNEY HOOK

MR. ARNOLD'S reply to my review has the qualities of charm and debonair irrelevance which characterize all his writings. But it fails to join issue with me on any of the basic points I have raised. Certainly, to describe my attitude as "inspirational" is not only polite name-calling, it is demonstrably inaccurate. Nor is he justified in contrasting it with his own "observational" attitude. After all, it is *he* who tells us that he is writing for "respectable people with humanitarian motives"; it is *he* who refers to politicians as "selfish"; it is *he* who explicitly affirms, "All (the observer) needs to worry about is the *character* of the people who are gradually coming into power. Does he think that they are good organizers and at the same time tolerant and humanitarian? If he reaches this conclusion, he need not worry about 'failure to balance the budget' " (my *italics*).

When I ask Mr. Arnold what he means by these ethical terms and how he squares his use of them with the contention that all ethical statements are meaningless, he replies that I am trying to substitute inspirational exhortations for description and analysis, and that his book is merely "an account of the actions and thoughts of people whom I have seen and observed." If this be so, I should like to ask Mr. Arnold who wrote Chapters XIII and XIV, as well as many other pages of his book. In the very first paragraph of Chapter XIII introducing "The Social Philosophy of Tomorrow," we read: "Something must be said to point out what men *should* believe in order to make them better, more cooperative, more just and more comfortable" (p. 332, *italics* in the original). I do not assert that this is inspirational but it is something more than descriptive. That Mr. Arnold should be compelled to repudiate a large portion of his book in order to escape from the impasse into which his own inadequate analysis has led him is highly significant.

But unfortunately, even in his retreat to mere description, Mr. Arnold does not stop to meet the difficulties I raised about the adequacy of his report of political behavior. He does not explain why, if all political behavior is mythology, one theory is accepted rather than another; why one organization triumphs over another when both use the same techniques of hokum and the circus. He speaks casually of "interests" but does not indicate what they are or how they enter into political life. He does not clearly distinguish between mythologies which are "false" and mythologies which are "meaningless"; and of the latter between those that are meaningless because they are "uninterpreted" and those that are

meaningless because they are "self-contradictory." Nor does he ever make it clear whether it is only the politicians who run the government "while intellectuals write its songs and poetry" or whether it is the intellectuals "who sit in the seats of the mighty." In his book and in his reply, he says both.

In view of Mr. Arnold's difficulty in understanding his own position, I am not at all surprised that he should so completely misunderstand mine. It is not the case that I believe that one must have a theory of the good life before one can describe the political scene. What I assert is that a competent survey of the political scene must take note of the fact that men sometimes act intelligently, i.e., in the light of consequences. There is nothing unnatural in such behavior and nothing inspirational in calling attention to its importance. Whether we will or no human acts have consequences. The ability to perceive these consequences, and to organize preferences for some consequences over others into regulating norms to control subsequent action is natural to men and not to Yerkes' apes. Scientific study will show that this form of behavior is found among the first and not the second. One does not need to have a code of morals to discover that there are codes of morals. All one needs, in this as in every other intelligent inquiry, is an hypothesis. What Mr. Arnold refers to as the ineptitude of the philosophical mind, viz., the habit "of first determining what it wants to look for before it actually looks" is the *sine qua non* of scientific investigation. One wonders how Mr. Arnold can ever find anything, if he doesn't know what he is looking for.

But when we leave the plane of political description and urge that a *policy* of some sort should be adopted (as does Mr. Arnold in that part of his book which he has disowned), or when we assert that the character of this leader is *preferable* to the character of another (as does Mr. Arnold when he supports Roosevelt)—then we are explicitly making value judgments of a sort. Intelligence demands that we be clear about the nature of these judgments, and their grounds and their consequences. Now, Mr. Arnold himself, admits that when he speaks of techniques to remove social maladjustments he is implying "a set of values which are not defined." But he immediately adds, "I think however that definition of such values only confuses." His reasons I shall examine in a moment. The concession, however, that every policy presupposes value judgments is all that I need to substantiate my criticism that he is inconsistent in his descriptions of the nature of political policy and unclear about his own value judgments. No wonder he glosses over the brutal tyrannies of Stalin and Hitler while he pleads for politicians to be tolerant and humanitarian!

But why does Mr. Arnold believe that the definition of values only

confuses us? Because "these values are not derived from definitions: the persons moved by such values do not have their ideas clarified by such definitions." Of course values are not derived from definitions any more than a disease is derived from a definition of a disease. His observation has no pertinence whatsoever. Mr. Arnold is using "definition" here loosely as a synonym for analysis. Does he really believe that people understand the values they accept without analyzing the contexts in which values emerge, and the causes and consequences of their acceptance? If Mr. Arnold maintains that such knowledge can be achieved without analysis, he is literally committed to an inspirational theory of value. To be sure, many persons moved by values are unable or unwilling to clarify them by analysis. This is a fact and every scientific theory of history must take note of it. It still remains true, however, that there is no other way of clarifying them. Does this mean, as Mr. Arnold suggests, that I believe "a more careful analysis of the concept of the good life in Germany would have prevented the excesses of Hitler?" Not at all. On my theory of history, there are other factors which have much more influence in shaping events than proper semantic analysis. But a more complete analysis would indicate the moral quality of Hitler's (or Stalin's) excesses, prevent us from making a fetish of organizational power and success, and within certain narrow but important limits strengthen our opposition to attempts at extending them elsewhere.

The real issue, as I see it, between Mr. Arnold and myself is whether politics as a science and art can dispense with normative judgments, and whether normative judgments can be analyzed into statements about objects of intelligent interest, i.e., objects desired after reflection. I answer no to the first question and yes to the second, while Mr. Arnold seems to give inconsistent answers to both. As a concrete illustration of how hard it is to find his meaning and of the inconsistencies it runs into on any interpretation, we may take his reference to the Trotsky case. No more than John Dewey am I a political partisan of Trotsky or the other Moscow defendants. But it seemed sufficiently important to me to establish the truth about the Moscow trials to support the Dewey Commission of Inquiry. Concerning this, Mr. Arnold writes:

According to Mr. Hook's definition of the political "good life" recent Russian history involves a moral crime against Trotsky. This point of view led Mr. Hook to lend his name and prestige to a trial of Trotsky before a volunteer court in Mexico. I admire his courage, in this enterprise, but think his point of view obscures political observation and judgment.

Now what is Mr. Arnold trying to say? That there is no such thing as "a moral crime" in politics and that therefore governments cannot be guilty of them? Or does he mean that it is unimportant whether or not "moral crimes" are committed in politics, or perhaps only that this particular crime is unimportant? Or, as his last sentence suggests, that no political crime has been committed at all and that Trotsky, despite the findings of the Dewey Commission, is guilty as charged? If he means the first, then I think the conscience of mankind is against him, and his own verbal habits play strange tricks on him. For he uses the language of moral judgment in his book, and when not in the mood of hard-boiled romanticism would probably admit that a "frame-up" is a moral crime. (If I am not mistaken, he has even protested against some, e.g., Sacco-Vanzetti.) If he means the second, then the judgment that it is unimportant whether moral crimes are committed by governments is certainly a moral judgment. This would mean that Mr. Arnold himself has a point of view concerning the political "good life"—one which is tolerant of frame-ups—but is unaware of what it is. And for some strange reason he thinks it is a virtue not to be aware of this point of view, thus depriving himself of the opportunity of checking or criticizing it. If, however, he believes that only this particular frame-up is unimportant, on the ground that it does not affect America, he is clearly wrong and would be a bad political scientist. For the Russian system is being urged upon the American people as an alternative to our own and the methods of frame-up have already been attempted in America by certain interested parties in order to further Russian interests. Finally, if he believes that the Moscow trials were not frame-ups, on what possible grounds can he imagine that the desire to discover the truth about them necessarily obscures our judgment and observation? Indeed, on this last view he should have been among the first to support the Dewey Commission of Inquiry. What Mr. Arnold really believes is his own secret, but the *objective* effect of his verbal confusion is to support the position that whatever is, is right.

Mr. Arnold is perfectly justified in assuming that organizations are necessary to implement social philosophies. But they are not sufficient. One must also have a social philosophy. Absolute loyalty to a social philosophy, in independence of the conditions and circumstances which make it applicable, is unintelligent Utopianism. Absolute loyalty to organizations independently of the qualities of life they generate is degrading to discriminating intelligence. Mr. Arnold gives us a choice between the insanity of uncontrolled myth and the inhumanity of uncontrolled power. We reject both.